Marsha "Pay It No Mind" Johnson was an incredible activist, sex worker, drag queen, and black trans woman who every queer person in the US today owes an immense debt of gratitude, whether they are aware of it or not.

Hers is a name you've almost definitely heard before… she has been honored in books, documentaries, a google icon tribute, and much more since her death in 1992. However, many accounts of her life are sanitized, more palatable versions of the truth. This article will not be that.

A Photograph of Marsha P. Johnson Reading a Letter at Her Birthday Party

Many articles on Johnson's early life deadname and misgender her, which you will also not find here.

She arrived in New York City from her hometown in New Jersey at only age 17 and quickly established herself in Greenwich Village. This was not the Village as it's known today.

The Village had long been a hotbed for artists, from the beat poets of the 50s onwards.
The neighborhood was known for its avant-garde stylings, revolutionary culture, and frequent police brutality.

Both sex work and same-sex relations were illegal in New York City at the time, and The Village had both in spades. Gay bars, at this time, were the main cultural center for queer people, and in response, the NY State Liquor Authority, as well as the New York Police Department, targeted gay bars in particular.

People do recognize that through cooptation, queer spaces are being taken away from us. The response has been to start creating alternative spaces like Savour, Gay Shame, Vazaleen, Alternative Pride (Queer By Nature), etc. However, all of these spaces (as important as they are) do not confront the cooptation of existing queer spaces.

Without an active resistance against the cooptation of existing queer spaces, we are perpetually caught in a cycle of having to create alternative spaces to alternative spaces to alternative spaces to alternative spaces...

That's why alongside creating alternative spaces, we need to actively resist against queer spaces (like Pride) being taken away from us through cooptation. Otherwise, we are constantly giving into domination and facilitating ourselves being pushed into the margins. That's regression, not progress.

It's time to question and challenge our "community". It's time to fight back, and it's time to reclaim Pride. Along the same lines, we need to make sure that we become more inclusive with the Dyke March, keep it and develop it as a politicized space, and never ever lose it like we did Pride.

Respecting that resistance is created from a diversity of tactics, the following 3 actions (listed below) are being organized by different community groups for this year's Dyke March and Pride:

Limp Fist:
Resist! Revolt! Celebrate!

Sex Professionals of Canada:
Whores And Dykes Unite!

Queer Diversity:
Renegade Community Fair
& Protest Against The Coopation of Pride

Calling all Radical Queers, Trans People, Youth, Sex Workers, Poly People, Anti-Poverty Activists, & Allies:

Sick and tired of the mainstreaming of the "Gay Movement"?
Frustrated at being pushed out of and excluded from queer spaces?
Angry at getting kicked out of a queer community we helped create?

What the fuck? Is everyone buying into gentrification?
Are there no radicals left to fight back in Toronto?

If you're a pissed off and unapologetic hooker, tranny, gender queer, radical, lived/worked on the streets, or an ally, *it's time to fight back!*

Help build another (yes, another, 'cause we've been down this road before) resistance to the battle that's been with us ever since (and even before) the Stonewall riots.

Back in the day of the Stonewall riots, many of us weren't welcome in gay bars and this still holds true today in many of the posh gay spaces that have been created since.

Many of the people who started the Stonewall riots ended up joining and supporting the gay movement, yet they were quickly dropped from the gay agenda. Within a few years, the Gay Activists Alliance had eliminated drag and transvestite concerns from it's civil rights agenda and Drag rights were also eliminated from a proposed gay rights bill to make it more acceptable.

It's been decades and little has changed. We are now pushed into the margins and dissed by a movement we helped create. On top of that, we're constantly told to tone down as middle class queers are busy assimilating into mainstream culture and told to be grateful for the few scraps thrown our way.

Meanwhile, trans people, sex workers, homeless/street-involved queers, people of color, and the visibly queer constantly face increasing violence and marginalization with every new mainstream

— that queer people would pay to have a safe space to simply exist — and took it.

However, being catered to by the mob had consequences. The now-famous Stonewall Inn, for example, lacked running water to wash dishes or have sanitary bathrooms, and often served drinks that were unsanitary at best and dangerous at worst. Mob members routinely blackmailed patrons, threatening to out them if they did not perform favors or pay mob bosses.

The Stonewall Inn was one of the cheaper gay bars in the Village, and one of the few that allowed drag queens. It also allowed dancing, which was explicitly forbidden at most gay bars (due to dancing often attracting police attention). Although raids were common under the mafia's protection, the Inn's patrons were usually pre-warned.

The Stonewall became a nightly shelter for many queer youths who had nowhere else to turn, as the entry fees were much cheaper than many other locations.

This was where Marsha, 17, broke, and homeless, found herself. She, like many others in the area, turned to sex work to support herself. It was here that Marsha began doing drag, originally referring to herself as "Black Marsha". As time went on, she began using "drag" full-time. When questioned about this, she would reply "pay it no mind", and was asked it so often that she coyly took that as her middle initial.

On June 28th, 1969, NYPD officers raided the Stonewall Inn. The mob hadn't been warned about this raid. No one knew it was coming. The tippers of the NYPD that the Genovese family had hired failed them. The police found plenty of criminal activity, including bootleg alcohol and cross-dressers.

Cross-dressing was illegal at the time and it was police policy to have female officers take suspected cross-dressers to a bathroom, strip them, and forcibly investigate their genitals to determine if they were committing a crime.

If that sounds familiar to current legislation around sports for children emerging in the United States, it should.

These forced genital exams not only included drag queens, but butch

Some STAR members, particularly Rivera, were also active in the Young Lords, a revolutionary Puerto Rican youth organization. One of the first times the STAR banner was flown in public was at a mass demonstration against police repression organized by the Young Lords in East Harlem in 1970, in which STAR participated as a group. STAR House lasted for only two or three years and inspired a few short-lived imitators in other cities, but its legacy lives on even now.

A few other transgender groups formed in New York in the early 1970s. A trans woman named Judy Bowen organized two extremely short-lived groups: Transvestites and Transsexuals (TAT) in 1970 and Transsexuals Anonymous in 1971. More significant was the Queens' Liberation Front (QLF), founded by drag queen Lee Brewster and heterosexual transvestite Bunny Eisenhower.

The QLF formed in part to resist the erasure of drag and trans visibility in the first Christopher Street Liberation Day march, which commemorated the Stonewall Riots and is now an annual event held in New York on the last Sunday in June. In many other cities, this weekend has become the traditional date to celebrate LGBTQ Pride. The formation of the QLF demonstrates how quickly the gay liberation movement started to push aside some of the very people who had the greatest stake in militant resistance at Stonewall.

QLF members participated in that first Christopher Street Liberation Day march and were involved in several other political campaigns through the next few years—including wearing drag while lobbying state legislators in Albany. QLF's most lasting contribution, however, was the publication of Drag Queen magazine (later simply Drag), which had the best coverage of transgender news and politics in the United States, and which offered fascinating glimpses of trans life and activism outside the major coastal cities. In New York, QLF founder Lee Brewster's private business, Lee's Mardi Gras Boutique, was a gathering place for segments of the city's transgender community well into the 1990s.

The NYPD did not admit any wrongdoing or formally apologize for the violence and discrimination that led to and precipitated the Stonewall Riots until 2019. This is after years of advocacy to beg for even that crumb of closure. Nothing is over. None of these wounds are healed. The wounds haven't even been allowed to close, as police brutality and over-policing still plagues the queer community today, most prominently affecting trans women of color.

But let's get back to Marsha.

She is often cited as if the Stonewall Riots were her single great contribution to queer rights. This is a discredit to her. Her activism extended both earlier than and long after the riots. The Stonewall Riots became her origin story.

Imagine this. Imagine being a young black homeless trans woman drag queen sex worker in 1969. Whatever level of horror you're imagining isn't enough. You've been beaten, assaulted, harassed, arrested, abused, and more. And at only 23 years old, you see your community rise up. This is in the midst of protests and national movements against war and sexism and racism and violence and bigotry of all kinds.

In all of this, you and your allies, young and vulnerable though you are, with protection from neither the mob nor the police, homeless and destitute and barely allowed to so much as exist… someone throws a brick.

And it matters.

One person throwing a brick leads to an arrest.

Hundreds lead to a riot.

Thousands lead to a movement for a better world.

The mob at the Stonewall Inn breached multiple police barricades before setting fire to the Inn itself. The fire department was called, but the metaphorical fire that started that night was much more difficult to put out.

The protests lasted 5 days, garnering media attention and sparking increased awareness and activism for queer rights across the nation and the world.

The next year, in 1970, NYC's first Pride Parade began at the doors of the Stonewall Inn. June is Pride Month because of Stonewall, and because of a riot against police brutality.

Newspapers at the time tried to downplay the riots, and celebrated the "successes" of the police at containing them, to the point of obscuring the truth. Any mentions of violence committed by police are omitted, replaced by counts of officers injured and villainization of protestors. (Familiar?)

But for all the impact it had, Stonewall's Legacy remains taboo, and as such is sanitized to the point of falsehood in many retellings.

It was a riot, outright, with arson and violence against the police by a group of criminal sex workers, drag queens, queers, and mobsters.

Even at the time, many queer organizations such as The Mattachine Society disapproved and publicly tried to distance themselves from the rioters.

The queer community is not a monolith and never will be.

♠

QUEEN POWER

FAGS AGAINST PIGS IN
STONEWALL BUST

Rat Subterranean News
July 9-23, 1969

About 1:30 Saturday morning, I happened along Sheridan Sq. with a friend looking for a beer when we saw a crowd gathered outside the Stonewall, a famed gay bar. We walked over to see what was happening.

About 3-400 guys were jammed in around a police car in front of the door, taunting several pigs in plainclothes guarding the entrance.

"They raided the joint, the fucking bastards," a couple of guys told us. "Why?" we asked. "Operating without a a liquor license.."

"Shit, man, they's out like always to chase us down and give us a good fuck. They ain't got nothin else to do during the summer," a hip spade was shouting.

We tried to find more information, just as the pigs started hauling off in a squad car a guy they had dragged outside. The crowd protested wildly, booing, shrieking, "Up against the wall, faggots!"

"Beat it' off, pigs!" A few tried jumping out to disrupt the no-man's land between the door and the squad car, but most as yet were reticent about provoking any pig violence. Someone tried to sell me some speed, and another asked me for a knife. "I'm gonna slice up those motherfuckers' tires."

"How many arrests?" I asked. "A few," "What happened inside" I pursued. "About 1:15 they came, but they kept the music and dancing going so's not to get everyone up. They checked identity. If you had it they let you go, if not they held you up till they found out more."

The crowd grew larger and more agitated as the squad car drove off and a wagon pulled up. People began beating the wagon, booing, trying to see who was being hauled out and off.

Several pigs were on guard and periodically threatened the crowd unless

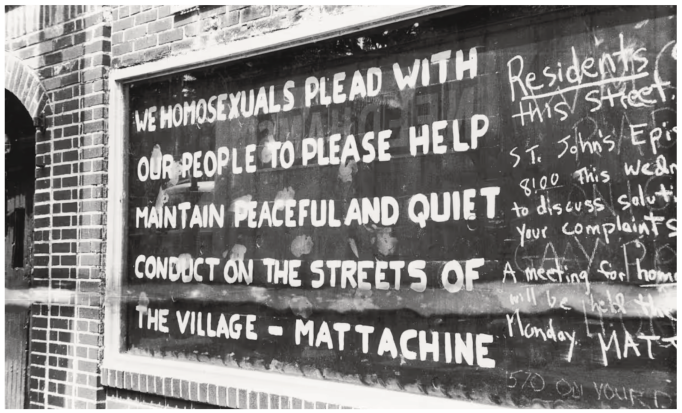
Marsha's unique style of drag (mostly foraged from the dumpsters of NYC) and tenacity led her to become the most famous drag queen of her era, even touring the world with the drag theatre company, Hot Peaches, in 1972. She also performed with the Angels of Light in 1973.

This was probably the high point of Marsha P Johnson's life.

Because fundamentally, the story of Marsha P Johnson is a story of failure. Not of her failure, but of the failure of her institutions, her peers, and her movement to prioritize their most vulnerable.

STAR was forced to close in 1973 but is still remembered as it was the first queer youth shelter in the United States as well as the first organization founded and run exclusively by trans women of color (that we know of).

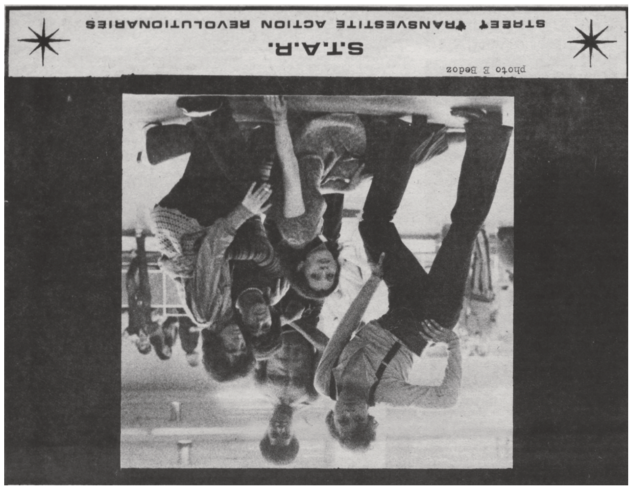
The organizers of the 1973 Pride Parade banned both Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, claiming that drag queens and "transvestites" would give the cause of gay liberation "a bad name". If this sounds familiar to the rhetoric currently circulating about whether kink and other "unseemly" queer presentations should be allowed at Pride, that's because *it's the same recycled argument.*



Message painted on the boarded-up Stonewall bar after the riots.

These were protests that the New York City Riot Squad was attempting to shut down, in the 60s, with 60s police tactics. The people in this photo are *so young*. The three people in front can't be older than 20. They are *kids*, marching in the street, risking their lives, to prove they exist and demand that they be allowed to. (Does this also sound familiar?)

Marsha, as well as a close friend of hers, a Latina trans woman named Sylvia Rivera, went on from Stonewall to become some of the most significant queer rights activists in history. These two founded the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) in 1970.



The primary goal of STAR was to serve as a mutual aid and support network for homeless transgender youth in NYC. STAR owned a building on the lower East side, and from there, sheltered, fed, organized, and advocated for trans youth.

This year also saw the first Pride Parade, which was a celebration and vigil to commemorate the anniversary of the riot.

The cops inside were scared shitless, dodging projectiles and flying glass. The orgy was taking place. Vengeance vented against the source of repression-gay bars, busts, kids victimized and exploited by the mafia and cops. Strangely, no one spoke to the crowd or tried to direct the insurrection.

Everyone's heads were in the same place. Some chanted "occupy-take over, take over" "Fag power," but kids were really scared about going too far as they saw the cops pulling guns from inside, pointed directly at the crowd.

A volley of objects bounced off the walls inside. Then one cop in a fury took his gun and actually hurled it at the crowd. People couldn't believe what had happened, for the gun hit the door frame with a clunk and lay there. A miracle it hadn't gone off.

The pigs carried futility to the extreme and turned the firehose on the mob through the door. Jeers, derision. Some shouted to "grab it, grab his cock" Some then let a trash can full of paper afire and stuffed it through the window. Flames leaped up. Then "Riot pigs" somebody was shouting. Sirens approached and kids started spilling out over the fences of Sheridan Square to flee the scene.

On each side together there must have been around 1500-2000 people by this time milling about, being pushed back by about 30 or more riot cops. It was hard to tell exactly how many. But no one was ready to get their heads beat in and most of the crowds to the sides were now filled with the curious.

People hung around till after 4 am talking in little groups. People were excited and angry. In talking to a number of kids who had been inside, it was evident most understood at least rudimentarily what was happening to them. What was and should have always been theirs, what should have been the free control of the people was dramatized shown up for what it really was, an instrument of power and exploitation. It was theatre, totally spontaneous. There was no bullshit.

"It's hard work, being beautiful, when you don't have a place. I do my best though," Marsha drawled, putting another earring in her hair and spearing another piece of potato salad. "I'm trying to get my own place so I can have my wardrobe and I can set up my candles to the saints, my own altar. I haven't had my own alter in a long time. Maybe by the time of the gay pride parade I will have an apartment so I can invite my friends up for cocktails." Later, talking with Marsha's friends, I find that Marsha is always looking for apartments; she rarely gets one.

Marsha will carry a GAY LOVE banner in this year's parade, her ninth. "When I started I carried the S.T.A.R. banner, and then it became the GAY POOR PEOPLE banner and it's been GAY LOVE for the last couple years. I think that says everything. All the gay love party will do is give gay birthday parties. I'd like to give birthday parties for Charles Ludlam, Jackie Curtis, Harry Koutoukas, Bob Kohler, Sylvia Rivera, Bambi L'Amour, Bob Storm, Holly Woodlawn, John John, and the Hot Peaches. I think that's the "best organization for now."

Marsha finished her bowl of potato salad, knocked back the last drop of a soda, shook the earrings in her hair, and walked into Sheridan Square. "It's changed, honey, this street is a different place. But when it gets down to it, it's money that rules the world, and Lucifer is coming. Yes he is. In the meantime, spare change for a dying queen, darling?"

What the fuck's wrong with you all?

Sylvia Rivera
1973

Transcript of a speech given at the 4th Annual Christopher Street Liberation Day Rally in Washington Square Park after having to fight her way on stage

Y'all better quiet down.

STAR is trying to do something for all of us, not just white middle-class men and women in their white club.

~ Sylvia Rivera, 1973

Here is a video of organizers at the 1973 Pride Rally asking the crowd if they want to hear Sylvia Rivera speak.

(speech transcript at page 45)

Watching her speak on the queer community at large ignoring the most vulnerable among them (trans people, people of color, incarcerated people, and especially people in more than one of those categories) is still chillingly compelling to waWtch fifty years later, and horrifying to recognize the same fights still being fought within our community.

You can, quite loudly, hear the crowd booing her before she speaks, giving a speech about the rights of queer prisoners, and calling out the crowd for ignoring them. She also speaks about STAR and calls the crowd out for ignoring its vulnerable transgender members.

Marsha recently appeared in a Hot Peaches show celebrating the Pope's death. In honor of the occasion, Marsha was a nun for a night in a white habit and green-glittered eyes. She pulled out a crumpled paper and sang from it: "Climb Every Mountain," every verse, her voice wandering acapella up and down the scale. The audience, stoned and silent, hardly breathed, and then rose at once in honor. Marsha's power with her followers is hard to describe, but it is undeniable. When friends describe her they invariably use words like "saint," "charismatic queen," and "myth." In fact, Marsha was formally canonized years ago in a ceremony conducted by the Angels of Light and the Hot Peaches.

Some of Marsha's charisma is simply due to her survival power. Her past life would have destroyed many: several attempts on her life by johns, eight nervous breakdowns (by Marsha's count); more than 100 arrests (Marsha doesn't count anymore). A revolving door life, from the streets to Riker's Island to Bellevue to Central Islip Hospital to the Tombs.

But to her admirers Marsha represents more than streetwise survival. She can turn conventional values on their head, publicly affirming her differentness, making beauty from the most unlikely materials. Marsha's camp-garbage aesthetic is shared by many street transvestites — affordable, democratic taste — but Marsha is an acknowledged leader. "Marsha caught on like wildfire," Bob (formerly Flash) Storm remembers, "and set all these new trends in dressing. She was the abundance and beauty of the street trash. And flowers, always flowers. Going after this sky-high energy with extreme makeup and colored wigs and pins and jewelry. She looked like an ornament when she was done." Marsha's transformation defies masculinity, but she is still a far cry from feminine — her out-sized features protruding beneath the makeup, flamboyant clothes set on a six-foot body, muscled arms and legs.

Her plumed saintliness is volatile, however; two weeks after her night as a nun, Marsha was in Riker's Island again after striking a Ty's bartender who had refused his patronage. It was not an isolated incident. One Christopher Street shop manager called Marsha a "bully underneath that soft sweet manner." Others have cited Marsha's toughness, and Sylvia Rivera recalls she first met Marsha in a drag-out fight with a street queen who had pulled Marsha's Halloween wig from her head. Aggression has been a necessary part of Marsha's life. She doesn't make friends on Christopher Street.

Those who knew her, especially Sylvia Rivera, adamantly contested this, urging an investigation, especially after news surfaced that Marsha had been seen being harassed on the pier where her body was later found and that there was a massive wound to the back of her head.

An investigation was not conducted until activist Mariah Lopez succeeded in mounting enough pressure for the NYPD to reopen the case in 2012.

So far there have been no new leads and no convictions.

"Marsha's position on Christopher Street is double-edged. A martyr of gay liberation, she is denied entrance to many bars. Andy Warhol silkscreens of Marsha sell for $1400 while Marsha walks the sidewalk outside, broke."

Steve Watson
June 15, 1979
The Village Voice

"Gay people aren't fighting anymore," drawled Marsha P. Johnson, 34. "They don't care as long as they have a bar to go to. You know that, darling. But when I came down here 10 years ago, I caught the drift the minute I walked into Sheridan Square. I said, 'It's about time, honey.' "

We were sitting in the Bagel And, originally the Stonewall bar, where resistance to police raids started gay liberation 10 years ago. This evening the space around us aspired to sleek wholesomeness instead of the warm sleaze of an unmarked, underlit gay bar — hanging plants instead of go-go boys. But despite the changes over 10 years, Marsha looks the same, still in her drag that is vibrantly out of tune with the times. When Marsha saunters up Christopher Street, a younger generation of ersatz cowboys and truckers looks at her as a plumed curiosity: why would anyone want to do that?

Marsha's drag the night we talked was merely a "'functional layering of coat over sweatsuit over a florid blouse; it had been a rainy day on the streets. But no weather could keep costume-jewelry earrings from Marsha's hair, nor the red plastic high heels from coming out of her bag once we were away from the puddles. Marsha patted a dab of rouge on her brown cheeks, added a scent of faded cologne, focused on me, on the potato salad, on the air, and continued on in her lazily singsong voice.

The love and the money go towards a caricature of the person Marsha P. Johnson was. We made her digestible. We made her simple. We, as a community, let her wallow in poverty, let her be murdered, and now let her memory be sanitized and scrubbed clean of its significance or authenticity.

We have failed her, and we continue to fail her.

She may be gone, but so many others are here. Do you look away when you see them? Are you too afraid to include them in your activism for fear that they will make your cause harder to swallow? Do you turn them away because they aren't "respectable enough" for your movement?

This article features almost as many photos of her as I could find. That's for good reason. I want people to look her in the eyes, and recognize her whole humanity, and grapple with what we've done to her, collectively, through our negligence.

The part that absolutely breaks me, every single time, is that in almost every picture taken of her, Marsha P. Johnson is smiling.

Before anyone dares say it; she was not martyred.

She was murdered.

She didn't want to die. She had a full life that she was living, and it was ripped away. There's no justice, no glory, and no goodness to come of that.

How can I tell you.

How can I convince you, brother; sister that your life is in danger.

That everyday you wake up alive, relatively happy, and a functioning human being, you are committing a rebellious act.

You as an alive and functioning queer are a revolutionary.

There is nothing on this planet that validates, protects or encourages your existence. It is a miracle you are standing here reading these words.

You should by all rights be dead.

Text of a manifesto originally passed out by people marching with the ACT UP contingent in the New York Gay Pride Day parade, 1990

THE QUEER NATION MANIFESTO

But of course that would mean listening to our anger, which they almost never do. They deflect it, by saying "I'm not like that" or "now look who's generalizing" or "You'll catch more flies with honey ... " or "If you focus on the negative you just give out more power" or "you're not the only one in the world who's suffering." They say "Don't yell at me, I'm on your side" or "I think you're overreacting" or "Boy, you're bitter."

Let Yourself Be Angry

They've taught us that good queers don't get mad.

They've taught us so well that we not only hide our anger from them, we hide it from each other. We even hide it from ourselves. We hide it with substance abuse and suicide and overachieving in the hope of proving our worth.

They bash us and stab us and shoot us and bomb us in ever increasing numbers and still we freak out when angry queers carry banners or signs that say Bash Back.

No Sex Police

For anyone to say that coming out is not part of the revolution is missing the point. Positive sexual images and what they manifest saves lives because they affirm those lives and make it possible for people to attempt to live as self-loving instead of self-loathing.

As the famous "Black is beautiful" changed many lives so does "Read my lips" affirm queerness in the face of hatred and invisibility as displayed in a recent governmental study of suicides that states at least 1/3 of all teen suicides are Queer kids. This is further exemplified by the rise in HIV transmission among those under 21.

We are most hated as queers for our sexualness, that is, our physical contact with the same sex. Our sexuality and sexual expression are what makes us most susceptible to physical violence.

Our difference, our otherness, our uniqueness can either paralyze us or politicize us.

Hopefully, the majority of us will not let it kill us.

untitled

Why in the world do we let heteros into queer clubs? Who gives a fuck if they like us because we "really know how to party?" We have to in order to blow off the steam they make us feel all the time! They make out wherever they please, and take up too much room on the dance floor doing ostentatious couples dances. They wear their heterosexuality like a "Keep Out" sign, or like a deed of ownership.

Why the fuck do we tolerate them when they invade our space like it's their right? Why do we let them shove heterosexuality - a weapon their world wields against us - right in our faces in the few public spots where we can be sexy with each other and not fear attack?

It's time to stop letting the straight people make all the rules. Let's start by posting this sign outside every queer club and bar:

My feet pound the streets and Peter's hands are chained to a pharmaceutical company's reception desk while the receptionist looks on in horror and Eric's body lies rotting in a Brooklyn cemetery and I'll never hear his flute resounding off the walls of the meeting house again.

And I see the old people in Tompkins Square Park huddled in their long wool coats in June to keep out the cold they perceive is there and to cling to whatever little life has left to offer them, and I think, ah, they understand.

And I'm reminded of the people who strip and stand before a mirror each night before they go to bed and search their bodies for any mark that might not have been there yesterday. A mark that this scourge has visited them. And I'm angry when the newspapers call us "victims" and sound alarms that "it" might soon spread to the "general population."

And I want to scream "Who the fuck am I?" And I want to scream at New York Hospital with its yellow plastic bags marked "isolation linen," "ropa infecciosa" and its orderlies in latex gloves and surgical masks skirt the bed as if its occupant will suddenly leap out and douse them with blood and semen giving them too the plague.

And I'm angry at straight people who sit smugly wrapped in their self-protective coat of monogamy and heterosexuality confident that this disease has nothing to do with them because it only happens to "them."

And the teenage boys who upon spotting my "Silence = Death" button begin chanting "Faggots gonna die" and I wonder, who taught them this? Enveloped in fury and fear, I remain silent while my button mocks me every step of the way.

And the anger I feel when a television program on the quilt gives profiles of the dead and the list begins with a baby, a teenage girl who got a blood transfusion, an elderly Baptist minister and his wife and when they finally show a gay man, he's described as someone who knowingly infected teenage male prostitutes with the virus.

What else can you expect from a faggot? I'm angry.

An Army of Lovers Cannot Lose

Being queer is not about a right to privacy; it is about the freedom to be public, to just be who we are. It means everyday fighting oppression; homophobia, racism, misogyny, the bigotry of religious hypocrites and our own self-hatred. (We have been carefully taught to hate ourselves.) And now of course it means fighting a virus as well, and all those homo-haters who are using AIDS to wipe us off the face of the earth.

Being queer means leading a different sort of life. It's not about the mainstream, profit-margins, patriotism, patriarchy or being assimilated. It's not about executive directors, privilege and elitism. It's about being on the margins, defining ourselves; it's about gender-fuck and secrets, what's beneath the belt and deep inside the heart; it's about the night. Being queer is "grass roots" because we know that everyone of us, every body, every cunt, every heart and ass and dick is a world of pleasure waiting to be explored. Everyone of us is a world of infinite possibility.

We are an army because we have to be. We are an army because we are so powerful. (We have so much to fight for; we are the most precious of endangered species.) And we are an army of lovers because it is we who know what love is. Desire and lust, too. We invented them. We come out of the closet, face the rejection of society, face firing squads, just to love each other! Every time we fuck, we win.

We must fight for ourselves (no else is going to do it) and if in that process we bring greater freedom to the world at large then great. (We've given so much to that world: democracy, all the arts, the concepts of love, philosophy and the soul, to name just a few of the gifts from our ancient Greek Dykes, Fags.)

Let's make every space a Lesbian and Gay space. Every street a part of our sexual geography. A city of yearning and then total satisfaction. A city and a country where we can be safe and free and more. We must look at our lives and see what's best in them, see what is queer and what is straight and let that straight chaff fall away!

Remember there is so, so little time. And I want to be a lover of each and every one of you.

Next year, we march naked.

Get Up, Wake Up Sisters!!

Your life is in your hands.

When I risk it all to be out, I risk it for both of us. When I risk it all and it works (which it often does if you would try), I benefit and so do you. When it doesn't work, I suffer and you do not.

But girl you can't wait for other dykes to make the world safe for you. **stop** waiting for a better more lesbian future! The revolution could be here if we started it.

Where are you sisters? I'm trying to find you, I'm trying to find you.

How come I only see you on Gay Pride Day?

We're out. Where the fuck are you?

untitled

I hate Jesse Helms. I hate Jesse Helms so much I'd rejoice if he dropped down dead. If someone killed him I'd consider it his own fault.

I hate Ronald Reagan, too, because he mass-murdered my people for eight years. But to be honest, I hate him even more for eulogizing Ryan White without first admitting his guilt, without begging forgiveness for Ryan's death and for the deaths of tens of thousands of other PWA's - most of them queer. I hate him for making a mockery of our grief.

I hate the fucking Pope, and I hate John fucking Cardinal O'Connor, and I hate the whole fucking Catholic Church. The same goes for the Military, and especially for Amerika's Law Enforcement Officials - the cops - state sanctioned sadists who brutalize street transvestites, prostitutes and queer prisoners.

I also hate the medical and mental health establishments, particularly the psychiatrist who convinced me not to have sex with men for three years until we (meaning he) could make me bisexual rather than queer. I also hate the education profession, for its share in driving thousands of queer teens to suicide every year.

I hate the "respectable" art world; and the entertainment industry, and the mainstream media, especially The New York Times. In fact, I hate every sector of the straight establishment in this country - the worst of whom actively want all queers dead, the best of whom never stick their necks out to keep us alive.

I hate straight people who think they have anything intelligent to say about "outing." I hate straight people who think stories about themselves are "universal" but stories about us are only about homosexuality.

I hate straight recording artists who make their careers off of queer people, then attack us, then act hurt when we get angry and then deny having wronged us rather than apologize for it. I hate straight people who say, "I don't see why you feel the need to wear those buttons and t-shirts. I don't go around tell the whole world I'm straight."

I hate that in twelve years of public education I was never taught about queer people. I hate that I grew up thinking I was the only queer in the world, and I hate even more that most queer kids still grow up the same way. I hate that I was tormented by other kids for being a faggot, but more that I was taught to feel ashamed for being the object of their

It is not enough, according to the religious right, to consistently advertise procreation and heterosexuality ... it is also necessary to destroy any alternatives. It is not art Helms is after ... It is our lives!

Art is the last safe place for lesbians and gay men to thrive. Helms knows this, and has developed a program to purge queers from the one arena they have been permitted to contribute to our shared culture.

Helms is advocating a world free from diversity or dissent. It is easy to imagine why that might feel more comfortable to those in charge of such a world. It is also easy to envision an amerikan landscape flattened by such power.

Helms should just ask for what he is hinting at: State sponsored art, art of totalitarianism, art that speaks only in christian terms, art which supports the goals of those in power, art that matches the sofas in the Oval Office.

Ask for what you want, Jesse, so that men and women of conscience can mobilize against it, as we do against the human rights violations of other countries, and fight to free our own country's dissidents.

The more we allow homophobes to inflict violence, terror and fear on our lives, the more frequently and ferociously we will be the object of their hatred.

Your body cannot be an open target for violence. Your body is worth protecting. You have a right to defend it.

No matter what they tell you, your queerness must be defended and respected.

You'd better learn that your life is immeasurably valuable, because unless you start believing that, it can easily be taken from you.

If you know how to gently and efficiently immobilize your attacker, then by all means, do it. If you lack those skills, then think about gouging out his fucking eyes, slamming his nose back into his brain, slashing his throat with a broken bottle - do whatever you can, whatever you have to, to save your life!